

## Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

You have probably received an anonymous gift. Was that not surprising? A secret admirer? Gifts given in secret almost always inspire good responses. But what about this kind of “gift?” “Next time I go to the effort to help you, I would appreciate getting thanked!” Yikes. All of us, I’m sure, have been on the receiving end of that kind of remark at one time or another. We have also probably dished out those remarks as well.

Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*, once wrote: “We learn what kind of servant we really are when treated like one!” Again, yikes!

Jesus said that if we do “righteousness” to be seen of men, well, that will be our reward. But we will have none from God. On the other hand, what we do for God in secret, for His eyes only, will receive His reward. I’ve sometimes wondered if Billy Graham worries over this one. Don’t get me wrong. I love and respect Billy Graham. But he has had so much public acclaim, I will bet you that he has wondered if that acclaim is not his reward. Christian leaders are always at risk for seeking man’s applause and not God’s. It is ironic that every time a Christian leader assures his people that their service to God in secret is what counts, the message comes from someone who has obtained a public platform (this writer included). Happily Jesus did not teach that being noticed in public for “acts of righteousness” is wrong. His specific words were “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, TO BE SEEN OF THEM.” (Mt 6:1)



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God does not exist to serve us. We exist to serve Him. Yet, the Bible displays that God is constantly serving us—every breath we take is not accident, but divine gift. Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 10:26)

How many of us are serving God, I wonder? How often do I serve God, versus some aspect of my own good? I can assure you that one can do very high and holy acts of service out of ego needs. But even truly serving God, I find I still serve my best interests, because to do God’s will is actually the smart thing for me to do. Not every act of service needs to be painful. In fact, the more we flow with God’s Spirit, our small actions simply align themselves with God’s overall movement in and around us. But there will be startling moments when we can’t go forward. Our “flesh” will rebel. Usually not about serving God, but about serving God by serving another

person. God is wonderful and beautiful. People are not so wonderful and beautiful. God always treats us well. Sometimes people are just plain mean (except you and me, of course.)

Have you ever considered that giving money to charity actually merges you into the flow of divine life going on all around you? Well, not necessarily, but sometimes. Jesus made exception, very pointedly, about those who give money to be appreciated as “benefactors.” He said, “When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have received their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.” (Mt 6:2)

I’ve seen lots of brass plaques in lots of churches over the years, proclaiming the donor’s name or cause. According to Jesus’ words, that notice is their reward. Period. We are aware of philanthropists who give large sums of money to universities. Their name ends up on the building. That’s fine. We need people who can give generously. But according to Jesus, their name on the building, and whatever public applause they get will be their reward. Period.

When we serve in secret, our faith is then obvious. Remember, faith is acting as if something is so. We live by faith, not by sight. When we serve in secret, we are publishing notice in the heavens that we are a

people who are aware that God sees our every move. Whether others thank us or not, we give in secret, knowing we are giving “unto the Lord.” We give in secret because we want to give. We are not worried about reward for two reasons. One, Jesus has promised us that God sees what is done in secret and that He will reward us. I’m not going to be so “spiritual” as to say that I don’t want God’s reward. But that does bring me to the other part. As we grow in the kingdom, our “left hand won’t know what our right hand is doing,” because we will be concentrating on the giving, not the recognition, even the recognition from God. (Though it is OK to want, need, and count on His notice. I certainly do.)

Where do we start? Look around. Notice some good thing you can do, that no one else is likely to see. (If you are noticed, fine, but that is not your plan.) Pick up trash in your neighborhood. Wash someone else’s dish at work. Put air in the flat tire of the car next to you with your portable compressor. Give cash anonymously to the single mother you work with.

Our family life is just full of opportunities for secret service. (Yes, there are times in our family when we need to say what we did and yes, there are times NOT pick up after a family member. But in the kingdom we find it is not our role to “teach someone a lesson,” except ourselves.) The Holy Spirit will create an atmosphere of goodness in a family when even just one person is humbly and secretly serving others. God, who sees in secret, does reward us. At the least the reward is a spiritual climate of love.

I would like to finish with the matter of giving money at church. These thoughts are my opinions, based on Scripture, but I know not

everyone agrees with me on this. The tithe (giving ten percent) is wisdom, not righteousness. Like Sabbath-keeping, fasting, and Scripture memorization, tithing is a matter of wise living. We do these things, not to attract God’s notice, but because of the inherent blessedness attached to their practice. These practices work along lines similar to getting physical exercise. We don’t exercise for the applause of others (usually). Instead, we exercise for the benefits that accrue to us physically and emotionally.

Yes, I do believe that special blessings, financially and otherwise, occur when a person gives ten percent of his income to God. But what about 9.8%? Or 9.5%? Or how do you really know if you have given the full ten percent? Before taxes? (Did you remember to include Social Security?) And what about payroll deductions for life insurance or 401(k) plans? Or maybe you haven’t included employer medical benefits in your calculations of ten percent? We do well not to get too legalistic about ten percent. My opinion is that God is prepared to honor ANY amount given in love and faith and sacrifice, whether you hit the 10 percent bell or not. But good grief, why should we stop at ten percent? Do not we in America have the resources to contribute 20 percent, 30 percent, or even more? What is keeping us from doing so? Is it not that we have foolishly assumed a “right” to a standard of living that maybe was not ours to assume? It surely cannot be a coincidence that we have so many resources when much of the world has so few.

God knows what is going in the secret places of our hearts. He is after our learning to live by faith in His provision AND our learning the blessedness of sharing in His likeness through generous giving.

God loves a cheerful giver because He is a cheerful giver. C. S. Lewis’ comment on how much to give is exactly right. “If it doesn’t hurt, it probably isn’t enough.” And let’s add Jesus’ words too. “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

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